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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a commentary, by a representative of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education, on the Holmes Group publication (1995) titled "Tomorrow's Schools of Education." The Holmes Group is applauded for producing a much-needed, candid assessment of schools of education. The issue of marginal institutional practices can no longer be swept under the carpet, as schools of education use consistent, traditional, status quo, "tired" practices and offer preservice training that is irrelevant to the nature and demands of teaching. The hope of renewing schools comes from use of critical social analytic methods that will lead to the moral sensibility to move forward. Schools of education need to instill in future teachers a critical voice working for school renewal. A systematic dialogue leading to coherence of purpose and direction is needed. Adherence to National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education standards and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium principles would be a positive step. The reward systems in both research and teaching institutions need to be changed to encourage collaboration between college faculty and practitioners in professional development schools. Alliances with external groups, such as the National Education Association, should be broadened. (Contains 23 references.) (JDD)

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The Time for *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* is Today

an invited commentary

by

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The Time for *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* is Today

Introduction

On behalf of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education (AILACTE) I wish to take thank Judy Lanier and the Holmes Group for extending the invitation for an AILACTE representative to comment upon the draft of your forthcoming publication *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* (1995). AILACTE, a constituent group of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), represents 230 private colleges. AILACTE, too, is concerned about many of the issues raised in your report as evidenced by themes which have permeated our annual meetings, national forums, and publications over the past six years. Last month, for example, AILACTE just published *Promising Practices: Teacher Education in Liberal Arts Colleges*, a collection of twenty-three articles on innovative teacher preparation programs. The third in a four-part series, this monograph was preceded by *A View from the Top: Liberal Arts Presidents on Teacher Education* (1990) and *A View from the Academy: Liberal Arts Professors on Excellent Teaching* (1992). Forthcoming in 1996 in the series will be a volume devoted to descriptions of colleges operating in partnership with K-12 schools.

You are applauded not only for the gallant effort behind your monograph, but, more importantly, for widening the dialogue to include as many of us as possible who are involved in aspects of professional education for teachers. No longer is it prudent for teacher preparation institutions to remain isolated from one another or from external agencies and K-12 schools who also have vested interests in the quality of teacher candidates that graduate collectively from our schools. You are further applauded by putting into print a candid assessment of schools of education, a much needed evaluation that I hope fosters positive conversations and actions and is not unwittingly usurped by the Newt Gingriches around the country who would use the report to damn all of us in the name of deregulation and would forget the important input needs of schools (Darling-Hammond, 1992; Kozol, 1991) and the difficult working conditions of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Vavrus, 1987).

Tired Practices

The title of my critique of your draft publication is "The Time for *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* is Today." The time is today because if we do not take proactive steps, various organizations who are already our critics are more than ready to take over the field of teacher education. As John Goodlad (1991) in his study of education departments, schools, and colleges sadly found, there exists

> countless incidents of indifference and neglect on the part of individuals who have it in their power to make a difference, and of thoughtlessness among individuals casually perpetuating tired practices of yesterday that should never have been resorted to in the first place. (p. 67)

Your report boldly explores this troubling situation in search of the nub of the problem.

For those of us like myself, a Michigan State University graduate from the Lee Shulman days of the Institute for Research on Teaching, who find ourselves involved more heavily in the issues surrounding practitioner preparation than basic research, the picture you draw is neither simple nor pretty. Yet, as I note in the Forward to *Promising Practices: Teacher Education in Liberal Arts Colleges* (1994), the issue of marginal institutional practices can no longer be swept under the carpet:

> Goodlad's use of "tired" to describe many teacher education programs creates an image of bankrupt ideas peddled to preservice and experienced teachers within insular environments. Tired practices are noteworthy mainly for their avoidance of perspectives which acknowledge the inherent conflicts and contradictions of the learning and schooling process that teachers face each day. Under these conditions teacher education professors perpetuate inflexible notions of "official knowledge" (Apple, 1993) which belie the actual struggle over the school curriculum, policy, and teaching. Tired in their fragmentation and rarely grounded in multiple interpretations, closed systems of teacher preparation deny the meaning making that teachers and students construct from their own experiences and essentially reinforce hierarchies of knowledge, learning and work relationships. These

> programs are often the ones whose graduates claim that their preservice training was irrelevant to the actual nature and demands of teaching. (Vavrus, 1994b)

In essence, our own colleagues, as *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* dramatically outlines, are contributing to our battered image and operations.

I appreciate the sentiments behind AACTE president Richard Wisniewski's resolution to make NCATE accreditation a prerequisite for AACTE membership when he expresses his frustrations with having to carry along marginal institutions who contribute to the tarnished notion of education schools. Although, like many others, AILACTE disagrees with Dr. Wisniewski's prescription; we, too, are concerned about the tired practices that exist nationally, especially those institutions who operate outside the scope of any noticeable accountability. Yet, as *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* observes, "Regretfully, we found in our case studies that education school faculty resist the prospect of altering the traditional pattern, a stance that surely poses an obstacle to the reforms we wish to introduce" (p. 76). In his analysis of ancient Greeks and their respective desire to act on their beliefs correctly, classical scholar Roberto Calasso (1994) notes that "there is nothing so sad as a sacrifice made to the wrong god" (p. 319). In the same way, could it be that too many education professors are sacrificing their professional energies for the wrong purposes?

Shifting the Focus

Returning to the Forward to the most recent AILACTE monograph, I contrast the opposite of tired practices with the metaphor of promising

> to suggest hope and openness. Experiences which are "promising" offer empowering possibilities rather than alienating closure. Using the language of Margaret Buchmann and Robert Floden (1992), "tired" programs are noteworthy for their *consistency* while "promising" curricula embody *coherence*. (Vavrus, 1994b)

If anything can be said for certain about the condition for much of what historically falls under the name of teacher preparation, it is consistency, an adherence to tradition and the status quo.

Societal expectations have called on teacher education to socialize teachers away from being the kind of moral voices which might result in public conflicts (Spring, 1986). Yet the draft of this

Holmes report implies throughout that schools of education must emphasize "educational ethics" (p. 84) and be "fundamentally committed to supporting education that promotes rights, equity, and access" (p. 46) "by showing [education] students how the content relates to conditions that confront educators in the schools in which they work today" (p. 84). I suggest that without making a critical social perspective (Vavrus, 1993) the absolute cornerstone and priority of *Tomorrow's Schools of Education*, we have no coherence nor hope of renewing schools as your monograph asks. Furthermore, we will not have a solid knowledge base foundation to explore the kinds of democratic and humanist values -- along the lines presented this morning by Pat Carini (1995) -- we wish to see manifested in K-12 schools. A shift in focus is dramatically required if our collective mission is to serve the diverse needs of children and youth in our schools. But without critical social analytic skills, where do we find the moral sensibility to move forward?

Teacher preparation programs are now failing on the whole to develop for future educators, to use Goodlad's (1991) words, "the skills of discourse, debate, analysis of conflicting views, compromise, and the like required by faculties engaged in school renewal," turning out beginning teachers with "little interest in or vocabulary for discourse regarding moral issues and norms" (pp. 255, 256). If we do not instill a critical voice in our future teachers and in our dialogues within schools of education, we will continue to be reduced to fragmented techniques, disconnected from the social ills which impact upon elementary and secondary schools (see Vavrus, 1994a). Without a critical social grounding the call in *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* for reflection on existing schooling practices will simply result in what Cherryholmes (1988) calls "vulgar pragmatism" (p. 151), a condition where social conventions remain unquestioned. This clearly is not the vision of *Tomorrow's Schools of Education*, but may be the result unless the challenge to move to more cohesive, social approaches are embraced by our colleagues and the leadership within our colleges and universities. This is not an idle issue at a time when a racist text (Lane, 1994) such as *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murrary, 1994) is currently a best seller on college campuses.

Moving forward with *Tomorrow's Schools of Education*

One of the deans within the Holmes group shared with me that one of the innovations he instituted when he took over the deanship at a major university was the introduction of faculty meetings. Apparently, a lot of work was going on, but few conversations pertained to what it all meant for the next generation of teachers and children. In effect, much consistency of practice, but no coherence. The NCATE standards (1994) -- and here I am speaking just for myself professionally and finding myself in the same camp as Richard Wisniewski -- demand in "Category I" just what *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* is advocating and what the dean whom I cited was attempting: a systematic dialogue leading to coherence of purpose and direction.

Many object to the time demand required of NCATE "Category I" in coming to a faculty consensus on articulating conceptual frameworks, but this is what the draft of this Holmes report seeks. Unless the effort is simply perfunctory, engagement in "Category I" can serve as the basis for moving to the implementation of the INTASC principles (Interstate New Teacher, 1992) which seem to be embedded throughout *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* with reoccurring references to effective teachers needing to possess essential knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, dedication, skills, and performance within their "heads, hearts, and hands" (p. 27). Putting aside the debate over undergraduate v. graduate education as the site for preservice teacher education, collective adherence to NCATE standards and INTASC principles would be a positive step toward meeting the goals of *Tomorrow's Schools of Education.*

Changing the Reward System

Situating the education faculty working in collaboration with practitioners in professional development schools (Holmes Group, 1990) is where *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* sees practice becoming "the locus of inquiry" (p. 92) -- an approach reaffirmed by the powerful presentation earlier today from the Philadelphia teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1995). For AILACTE members this ought to be a reasonable expectation. However, as this Holmes report notes, the reward systems both in research and teaching institutions work against applied research. Ernest Boyer (1990) in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* offers a way out

of this quandary with his four discrete levels of scholarship. At a fundamental level those of us in AILACTE institutions, for example, see ourselves transforming knowledge for our students through our teaching, one aspect of Boyer's conception of scholarship. Continuing along his spectrum of scholarship, Boyer proposes the categories of application, knowledge used to solve "consequential problems" (p. 21); integration, "work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original 'research'" (p. 19); and finally discovery, "closest to what is meant when academics speak of 'research'" (p. 17). I see congruity between the kinds of scholarship *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* proposes and Boyer's recommendations.

Allies

Now is the time to move on your recommendation to broaden your ailiances with external groups (see pp. 110-114). This past November I had the opportunity to join in a meeting of various representatives of AACTE with the executive committee of the National Association of Education (NEA). The meeting was a rich one in which our common agendas and goals were acknowledged and affirmed. What I found most surprising, however, was that this was the first official meeting between AACTE representatives and the NEA executive board since 1982. NEA among others must become our allies to renew schools; we can not afford to wait in isolation for another 12 years to engage in dialogue on these important matters (see Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Chief state school officers and legislators must also become our allies as long as the constitutional responsibility for education rests with the individual states. Regardless of our national efforts, as long as states accredit teacher education programs we are stuck with, as *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* laments, "shoddy preparation that angers and embarrasses those who care deeply about the minds and welfare of America's young" (p. 1).

AILACTE, too, is your ally in this renewal process. We have already extended an invitation to Judy Lanier and her colleagues to share *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* with our members at our 1995 national forum this June in St. Louis. This Holmes report is cry for collaboration at all levels. Let us ease any boundaries that have unnecessarily divided us and work toward the common good as envisioned in *Tomorrow's Schools of Education.*

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